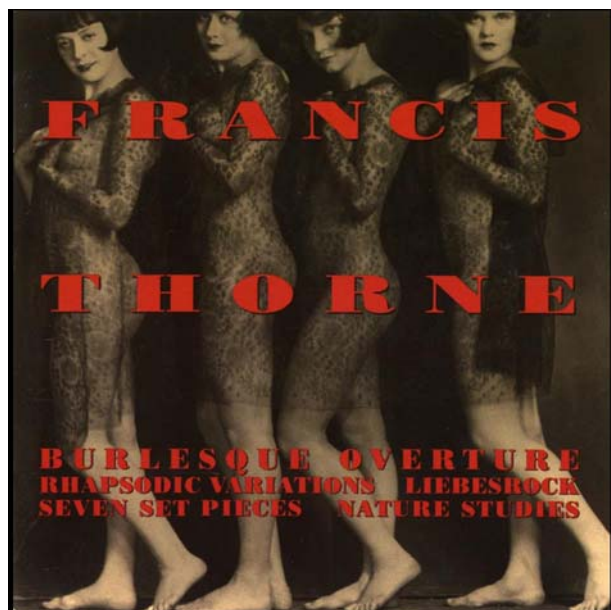


NWCR586

# Francis Thorne

Burlesque Overture; Rhapsodic Variations No. 1;  
Liebesrock; Seven Set Pieces; Nature Studies



1. *Burlesque Overture* (1964) ..... (8:48)
  2. *Rhapsodic Variations No. 1* (1964) ..... (13:29)  
Francis Thorne, piano; Polish National Radio  
Orchestra; William Strickland, conductor
  3. *Seven Set Pieces* (1967) ..... (20:04)
    1. I. Grottesque I (Adagio maestoso;  
Allegretto misterioso) ..... (3:52)
    4. II. Romance (Adagietto) ..... (2:58)
    5. III. Jam Session I (Presto Vivace) ..... (0:44)
    6. IV. Grottesque II (Allegretto;  
Grottesco)..... (2:22)
    7. V. Chorale Prelude  
(Adagio semplice) ..... (5:55)
    8. VI. Jam Session II  
(Allegro con fuoco) ..... (0:47)
    9. VII. Finale (Andante grazioso;  
Presto vivace) ..... (3:14)Contemporary Chamber Players of the  
University of Chicago; Ralph Shapey,  
conductor
- Nature Studies:*
10. *Three Poems of Howard Moss* (1981) ..... (17:25)
  10. Going to Sleep in the Country ..... (8:31)
  11. The Cricket ..... (2:43)
  12. Looking Up ..... (5:57)  
The Jubal Trio: Constance Beavon, mezzo-  
soprano; Sue Ann Kahn, flute; Susan Jolles, harp
  13. *Liebesrock*  
(A Parable for Orchestra) (1969) ..... (10:50)  
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; Geoffrey Fuller,  
electric guitar, electric bass guitar, electric bass;  
James Dixon, conductor

Total playing time: 70:43

© 1978, 1982 & © 1990 Composers Recordings, Inc.  
© 2007 Anthology of Recorded Music, Inc.

## Notes

“I believe the most natural music making comes from a great deal of listening, especially to one’s own inner ear.”

—Francis Thorne

If the stylistic diversity of his compositions is any indication, **Francis Thorne’s** inner ear must be as filled with the ragtime, jazz, and burlesque of his youth as it is with the trends and schools of modern composition.

Born in Bay Shore, New York, in 1922 into a musical family (his grandfather was Gustave Kobbé, who is best known for *Kobbé’s Opera Book*), Thorne studied piano from an early age. His first formal training took place at Yale University. After college came three-and-a-half years in the navy during World War II, followed by nine years working on Wall Street. All this time Thorne kept up his jazz piano playing, which brought him into contact with Duke Ellington, whose personal recommendation led to a two-year stint at Manhattan’s Hickory House—Thorne’s first professional job as a musician. His return to the world of music reactivated his desire to compose, bringing him two years of private study with David Diamond in Florence, Italy. “Diamond was not only a terrific teacher,” Thorne recalls, “but he was finally my real mentor and inspiration as far as serious musical composition was concerned.” In 1964, Thorne’s first mature

work, *Elegy for Orchestra*, received high praise at its premiere by the Philadelphia Orchestra, with Eugene Ormandy conducting.

With the success of the *Elegy*, Thorne returned to New York where he has lived ever since. His catalogue now comprises close to 100 pieces in a variety of genres. Maintaining his jazz credentials, Thorne has crossed over into the world of cabaret styles. As pianist and singer, with bassist Jack Six, he has recorded for CRI two albums of standards and rarities: “Irving Berlin Songs” and “Porter On My Mind.”

In addition to his composing and performing careers, Thorne has played a major role in music administration. He has held the executive director post at the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, the Lenox Arts Center, and the American Composers Alliance. He is currently president and CEO of the American Composers Orchestra (ACO), a symphonic ensemble entirely devoted to American music. During the concert season his efforts are focused on the ACO, reserving composing for the summer months. It is a combination of activities that makes full use of his varied experiences, with crossovers from business to artistic creativity, jazz to classical music.

The composer writes:

“*Burlesque Overture* (1964) strikes me as a typical curtain-raiser—bright, but with a rather sardonic undercurrent. Cast in a frankly contemporary jazz style, the music seeks to gain its effects through strongly contrasted episodes. It could be termed a rough fast-slow-fast, A-B-A form. What transpires grows out of the opening thematic idea, partially stated by two trumpets with woodwinds and then extended onto a fuller orchestral canvas. Percussion plays a prominent role throughout, although there are expressive episodes in slower tempos introduced midway in the overture that relieve the tension of the faster ones.

“*Rhapsodic Variations No. 1* (1964) is a reworking of a two-piano piece, wherein I tried to create a vehicle for myself to play. After a brief introduction, the solo piano states the main theme clearly. A continuous development follows with contrasting tempi and in what might be called a perpetual variation technique. About two-thirds of the way through the soloist is asked to improvise a cadenza (I improvised five during the course of the present recording and left it to Mr. Strickland to pick what he felt was the best). Then follows a fugue that works toward a finale, pressing forward with more and more noise and excitement to the very end.”

The *Seven Set Pieces* (1967) were premiered in 1970 by the Contemporary Chamber Players of the University of Chicago, conducted by Ralph Shapey, who originally recorded it on the Owl label. The *Seven Set Pieces* have garnered some comment from Thorne’s colleagues. In 1971, Virgil Thomson wrote to Thorne, “The *Seven Set Pieces* are charming, entertaining, and extremely coherent as musical thought or discourse. Also they hold the interest. I especially like the slow one called, I think, *Chorale*...”

For this recording, originally released in 1979, David Diamond wrote the following:

“The *Seven Set Pieces* have that balance between the newest technical panoply (a protective aesthetic armor that permits Thorne the maximum individual musical liberties) and the consistency of a rewarding communicative potential. Thorne thinks his structures through ‘loose and easy’ as most jazz experienced pianists have done, and he respects aesthetic freedom and never abuses it. The result is a fine work of topnotch craftsmanship and entertainment—a clear example of the future composed of fragments of the past—a work thoroughly of our time.

“The *Seven Set Pieces* have as their unifying thematic idea a series of twelve chromatic notes (A-natural, C-natural, A-flat, G-natural, G-flat, D-natural, E-flat, B-flat, B-natural, E-natural, F-natural, D-flat). The use of the word ‘set’ is both significant as a compositional ordering (in the sense of the note-row) as it is of jam session performance.”

*Nature Studies* was written for and dedicated to the Jubal Trio. The composer writes:

“*Nature Studies* was composed mostly at the MacDowell Colony in July of 1981. Having met Howard Moss there in 1965, I had long wanted to set his poetry to music. The three poems, ‘Going to Sleep in the Country,’ ‘The Cricket,’ and ‘Looking Up,’ were first published in the volume *Finding Them Lost*, a copy of which Howard Moss gave me right after we met. The return to New Hampshire was instrumental in my choosing these poems that relate in one way or another to nature.

“The setting of the first poem represents half the duration of the cycle. Although it is mainly slow and lyrical, there are several contrasting sections. The second song, however, is a real scherzo—two minutes of fast music. The third returns to slow, intensely lyric expressivity with a slight undertone of spirituality. I was moved to set this lovely poetry using the most direct and melodically simple means; this decision coincides with my recent return to composing at the piano that has extended my musical phrases in longer and more sustained lines.”

Francis Thorne completed *Liebesrock* (A Parable for Orchestra) in 1969. The work calls for electric guitar, electric bass guitar, electric bass obbligato, brass, percussion, timpani, piano, harp, and strings. Its score carries the following programmatic introduction:

“In the summer of 1968, while watching a room full of dancers gyrating to rock and roll music played at deafening volume with strobe lights blazing, I was suddenly overcome with a feeling of uneasiness verging on fear. The scene before my eyes was clearly juxtaposed against the vision of men dying in the jungles of Vietnam and of politicians and military leaders making decisions not from strength and magnanimity but from arrogance and fear. The country seemed to be helplessly teetering on the brink of disaster, which was manifested in the grotesque sounds and sights that assaulted my ears.

*Liebesrock* is a musical representation of this momentary vision—a mass dance of death-wish.”

---

## Production Notes

### *Burlesque Overture*

#### *Rhapsodic Variations No. 1*

Recorded by Polskie Nagrania in Poland, 1966

### *Seven Set Pieces*

This 1968 recording was remixed in 1978 by Michael Riesman.

The original recording was made possible by grants from the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University and the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, Inc.

### *Nature Studies*

Recorded by Tom Lazarus at Vanguard Studio, NYC, February 1982. Produced by Carter Harman.

The original recording was made possible by grants from the Contemporary Music Society, the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, and private donors.

### *Liebesrock*

Recorded by Brian C. Snelling at Barking Town Hall, January 28, 1970. Produced by Carter Harman.

The original recording was made possible from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, Inc., the Contemporary Music Society, and the National Institute-American Academy of Arts and Letters.

*Burlesque Overture* is published by Merion Music (BMI). All other works published by ACA (BMI).

This recording was made possible by the generous support of Paul Underwood. Special thanks: Rosalie Calabrese.